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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the results of a survey of 1,277 libraries in Illinois which investigated the status of job sharing in armed forces, college and university, community college, government, law, medical, public, religious, and special libraries and library systems. Job sharing is described as the division of one full-time job between two or more people, who voluntarily work part-time and share the responsibilities and benefits of one full-time job. Queries to job sharers and their library directors measured job sharing by focusing on such factors as reasons for job sharing, characteristics of the shared job, and the overall effectiveness of job sharing as perceived by the job sharers and library administrators. The survey showed that both employers and employees are overwhelmingly in favor of job sharing, although both advantages and disadvantages are identified. In particular, the importance of communication was stressed, and the need for additional time to be spent on both supervision and evaluation was noted. (EW)

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JOB SHARING: IS IT IN YOUR FUTURE?

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ABSTRACT

Work patterns of many Americans, including library employees, have changed in recent years. Various methods of alternative staffing have become available to library staff--one of which is job sharing (a form of part-time employment in which one full-time job is divided by two or more people who voluntarily work part-time and share the responsibilities and benefits of one full-time position). To investigate job sharing in Illinois, a study was conducted in 1,277 libraries which included the following types: armed forces, college and university, community college, government, law, medical, public, religious, special, and library systems. Queries to job sharers and their library directors measured job sharing by focusing on such things as reasons for job sharing, characteristics of the shared job, and the overall effectiveness of job sharing as perceived by the job sharers and library administrators. The survey showed that both employees and employers are overwhelmingly in favor of job sharing.

Alternative work schedules (of which job sharing is only one) have become very important to workers in business, industry, and government, as well as education. In 1981, predictions made by the Work in America Institute not only included a reduction in the workweek to thirty-six hours, but an increase in flexible work schedules. It was predicted that by 1990 twenty-eight percent of

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full-time nonagricultural workers would be engaged in some form of part-time work, job sharing, or work sharing.¹

Alternative work patterns are evolving because of several factors: an increasing number of women in the labor force, an increasing number of single-parent households, an increasing number of older employees in the workforce, and an increasing number of highly educated employees (many of whom seek white collar jobs). There is also evidence of an increasing desire among employees to have more control over their work schedules.

Employers like the advantages of alternative work schedules because of their increasing concern about the better use of physical resources (which help offset the high costs of materials, inflation, and the inefficiencies of some workers) as well as the increased utilization of more human resources, thus helping to reduce the high number of unemployed looking for jobs. In other words, business and management leaders are now changing some of their traditional beliefs about work environment, work schedules, and job performance. More and more examples of alternative work schedules have been implemented, with a frequent increase in efficiency, productivity, and quality of working life.

A form of alternative work scheduling which I have recently investigated is job sharing. In order to gather information on the job sharing situation in Illinois libraries, I conducted a survey of library employees in Illinois who were job sharing and directors of libraries who were employing job sharers.²

What is the definition of job sharing? Job sharing is a form of part-time employment in which one full-time job is divided by two people who voluntarily work part-time and share the responsibilities and benefits of one full-time position. For example, two librarians may decide to share a library position by splitting the day--one

working in the morning, the other in the afternoon. They are both committed to librarianship but have voluntarily opted for a reduction in work hours while maintaining half their salary and a portion of their fringe benefits.

Do you, the employee, want to job share? Do you, the administrator, want your employees job sharing? In order to answer these two questions, we need to look at both the advantages and disadvantages of job sharing from both viewpoints--the administrator's and the employee's.

However, before we examine the specific advantages and disadvantages, let us look briefly at the more general issue of job sharing. Job sharing is usually conceived of as a type of part-time employment which is voluntary and permanent. "The sharing is either horizontal, in which case each of the two partners is responsible for the total job requirements, or vertical, in which each team member is responsible for a defined half of the job."³

In both cases, job sharing "implies a career orientation, a labor-force attachment and a potential for upward mobility, which, historically, has not been associated with part-time work."⁴

Because job sharing and part-time employment are frequently confused, it is important to make several significant distinctions as to what job sharing is and is not:

1. Job sharing is voluntary.
2. Job sharing is a way of restructuring a professional position which cannot be made into discrete part-time positions.
3. Job sharing often demands a good deal of communication and cooperation between sharers. Job sharers are committed to, and take responsibility for, the whole job.
4. Job sharing may involve a variety of salary schedules.

Often the salary is prorated on the basis of the time spent on the job (normally fifty-fifty); but, in some cases, the skills of the partners may be unequal, necessitating a different pay scale where one partner might be paid more than the other partner. Pay is usually based on a salary, however, and is not an hourly wage.

5. Job sharing work schedules can be divided in various ways. The schedule may include one day on, one day off; a half-day on, a half-day off; with no overlap or some overlap one day a week. The partners can alternate working weeks and months, even several months.
6. Job sharing usually has fringe benefits, while part-time employment does not. Fringe benefits may include these: medical/hospital insurance, life insurance, disability insurance, a pension plan, profit sharing, vacation, sick leave, and paid holidays. Whether fringe benefits are prorated, divided, paid, or not paid varies greatly from employer to employer.
7. Job sharing is not work sharing. Sometimes, in an effort to fight unemployment and avoid layoffs, work sharing is proposed which involves the reduction of an employee's work time and salary. This reduction is usually temporary, but in most cases is not voluntary.⁵

Job sharing has been found to be popular in a variety of business organizations, including all kinds of libraries--especially school libraries, college and university libraries, public libraries, and special libraries.

However, several disadvantages of job sharing can also be found. Job sharing is sometimes criticized as "the elimination of a full-time job opportunity to create two part-time jobs."⁶ The effects can be

negative. Part-time workers have fewer fringe benefits and opportunities for advancement, and are sometimes treated as second-class citizens. Because of this, many feel that job sharing is not at all acceptable to workers looking for full-time work or to women seeking full-time employment in order to support a family.

Both employees and employers see disadvantages to job sharing. Those disadvantages identified by employers include the following:

1. Job sharing can cause a lack of communication, coordination, and continuity on the job.
2. Two of everything is required as pertains to benefits--records, checks, vacation, and sick leave.
3. Additional time is spent in supervising and evaluating.
4. Expenditures for benefits and office space often increase.
5. Screening and training normally double expenses.
6. There is frequently difficulty in distinguishing individual responsibilities.
7. Job sharing can create confusion over time-sharing among co-workers.
8. Personality conflicts between sharers is a potential problem.
9. Recouping initial investment in training and start-up procedures may take longer than for traditional employees.
10. Replacement for one-half of a team is often difficult.
11. There can be frequent scheduling problems, e.g., staff meetings.
12. Certain jobs may be complicated and difficult to convert to part-time status.

Employees, however, do not usually see as many disadvantages to job sharing as employers do. An often cited disadvantage is the fact that one's take-home pay is automatically lower, but this fact is also an intrinsic part of the position which the sharer accepts when he or

she voluntarily agrees to part-time employment. Additional disadvantages of job sharing as perceived by employees include the following:

1. Job sharers are sometimes perceived as being less serious about their profession than are full-time employees.
2. Partners may have trouble adjusting to one another.
3. One partner may end up doing more than half the work for half the pay.
4. There may be no job security or tenure.
5. There is a decrease in benefits, health insurance, credits toward retirement, and vacation and sick leave.
6. Progress on career advancement, the salary scale, and rate of seniority is slowed or halted.

In spite of the problems listed above, the majority of people writing about job sharing view it as a positive form of alternative staffing and see more advantages than disadvantages. Employers are enthusiastic about job sharing and include the following among their list of advantages:

1. Administrators often feel they get more than their money's worth with two employees.
2. Increased manpower flexibility is available to employers.
3. The concept provides for the offering of a wider range of professional expertise.
4. There is continuity of job performance.
5. Time off for personal chores is reduced.
6. Employees often show greater enthusiasm.
7. There is an increased applicant pool.
8. Productivity may be increased both quantitatively and qualitatively.
9. Human resources are doubled.

10. Hiring costs are lower.
11. Overtime costs are lower or non-existent.
12. Turnover is lower.
13. Job sharing may serve as a recruitment tool.
14. Absenteeism and tardiness are reduced.
15. Job sharing reduces or eliminates the need to hire substitutes.
16. Training of new employees is the responsibility of the co-sharer.

Employees also see advantages of job sharing. Chief among these is the fact that job sharing allows a professional a chance to spend time at home with young children while also pursuing a career--on a part-time basis--until the individual is ready to return to full-time work. Additional advantages of job sharing perceived by employees include the following:

1. Job sharing helps prevent burnout.
2. Sharing is an excellent way for an older person to phase into retirement by reducing the work load.
3. Employee morale among sharers is often increased.
4. Sharers say they are relaxed and satisfied with their work and more cheerful overall.
5. A higher level of performance is often achieved due to shorter working hours.
6. Job sharing provides an opportunity to continue a career while allowing time off to devote to personal interests, families, households, recreation, and community activities.
7. Job sharing provides time to pursue professional interests such as advanced education, research, and consultancies.
8. Younger employees are able to learn from a more experienced partner.

9. Job sharing allows for the sharing of ideas and methods.

Thus, both employers and employees are enthusiastically supportive of job sharing in libraries.

Job sharers in Illinois libraries also felt very strongly that job sharing was effective in their organization. In response to the question "How is job sharing effective?" sharers responded with the following comments:

Job sharing

1. promotes harmony within the library;
2. prevents burnout;
3. allows for more flexibility in scheduling;
4. splits dull tasks between two positions;
5. blends talents, expertise, and interests of job sharers;
6. allows partners to cover and fill in for each other;
7. permits flexible scheduling and allows more time for families;
8. secures two minds for the price of one;
9. creates a part-time job for two people;
10. doubles creativity;
11. diminishes feelings of boredom;
12. generates more excitement and energy;
13. allows for input from two people rather than one;
14. provides a second option for those not wanting the demands of a full-time position but also not wanting to leave the profession; and
15. creates time to pursue further education.

Most Illinois library directors agreed that job sharing was effective in their organization. How this was accomplished included the following:

Job sharing

1. allows partners to fill in for one another;
2. utilizes expertise gained in other institutions;
3. allows for flexibility in scheduling;
4. enables employees to share ideas and experiences;
5. permits job variety;
6. enables the administration to use the talents of only those who wish to work part-time, such as college students, single parents, and retirees; and
7. meets the needs of employees.

The few library directors who indicated that job sharing was not effective had the following comments:

1. It creates communications problems between job sharers.
2. It creates tension between the supervisor and the job sharer.
3. It is not effective because it is underutilized.

In response to the question "Is job sharing contributing to the overall goals of the library?" sharers responded with the following comments:

Job sharing

1. creates more enthusiasm, new ideas, fresh energies, and better programming;
2. allows one person to pick up where another leaves off;
3. provides more than one point-of-view;
4. keeps experienced librarians on staff;
5. reduces potential for burnout;
6. aids team effort toward library goals; and
7. increases productivity.

Most library directors tended to agree with their employees that job sharing does contribute to the overall goals of the library.

This, they felt was accomplished in the following ways:

Job sharing

1. generates a freshness, enthusiasm, and energy;
2. increases the range of abilities and experience;
3. creates an ideal work environment;
4. responds to the needs of employees;
5. provides timely and high quality service;
6. fulfills a goal of hiring part-time staff;
7. expands ideas and interests;
8. allows for staff development; and
9. provides back-up help.

Comments on the negative side concerned the feeling that job sharers may not be as committed to the job as full-time employees, that communication is vital, and that the ability to give and receive orders is of extreme importance.

In my survey, library directors were given a list of fifteen commonly suggested reasons why job sharing can have a positive effect on a particular organization. They were then asked to check those reasons which applied to their organization. The top four reasons checked by over 50 percent of the respondents were these:

1. Job sharing increases employee flexibility in work scheduling.
2. Job sharing allows for the recruiting of applicants unable or unwilling to work full-time.
3. Job sharing provides an opportunity for less experienced employees to learn from more experienced employees.
4. Job sharing reduces hiring and training costs resulting from recruitment and turnover by retaining current employees who only want to work part-time.

Only one negative effect of job sharing seemed to stand out among the library director respondents: job sharing requires additional time

in supervising and evaluating.

These, then are the salient concerns--the pros and cons--when you consider the question "Is job sharing in your future?"

Footnotes

1. Work in America Institute, Inc., New Work Schedules for a Changing Society (Scarsdale, N.Y.: Work in America Institute, 1981), p.3.
2. Thyra K. Russell, "Job Sharing in Illinois Libraries" Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Illinois University, 1987.
3. "'Job Sharing' Has Growing Appeal for Workers Seeking Alternatives to Traditional Employment Patterns," World of Work Report 4 (May 1979):35.
4. Sharon Grady, "One Job, Two Careers," Working Woman 6 (March 1981):79.
5. Barney Olmsted, "Job Sharing: An Emerging Work-Style," International Labour Review 118 (May/June 1979):283-297.
6. John L. Zalusky, "Alternative Work Schedules: A Labor Perspective," The Journal of the College & University Personnel Association 28 (Summer 1977):55.